

## LESSON 2

# Building on the Past

### THINKING FOCUS

*How have we learned  
from the past?*

#### Key Terms

- myth
- culture

**I**carus, beating his wings in joy, felt the thrill of the cool wind on his face and the clear air above and below him. He flew higher and higher into the blue sky until he reached the clouds. His father called out in alarm. He tried to follow, but he was heavier and his wings would not carry him. Up and up Icarus soared, through the soft moist clouds and out again toward the glorious sun. He was bewitched by a sense of freedom; he beat his wings frantically so that they would carry him higher and higher to heaven itself.

Greek myth, "The Flight of Icarus," retold by Sally Benson

Did you ever wish you could fly? The idea of flight has intrigued people throughout the ages. Three thousand years ago the ancient Greeks told the story of a boy named Icarus who wanted to fly. Icarus flew toward the sun on wings made of feathers and wax. But he flew too close to the sun, and the wax melted. He fell from the sky to his death.

The story of Icarus is not true. It is a **myth**, a story told by people to explain their past. Nevertheless,

it shows that people long ago were also fascinated with flight.

People have been experimenting with flying machines since the days of the ancient Greeks. In the 300s B.C., a Greek named Archytas (*ahr KY tuhs*) built a "wooden pigeon" that moved through the air. Around the same time, the Chinese discovered how to make kites. Today, we have learned to make machines that let us fly. But like Icarus, we still try to fly higher, now reaching toward the stars.

## Learning from the Past

The dream of flight is one of the many ideas we share with the people who came before us. In fact, we owe much to the inventions and accomplishments of people of the past.

Many things we take for granted today were made possible by the achievements of the people

who came before us. Take, for example, something as simple as a bicycle. The bicycle as we know it dates back only to about 1790, when a Frenchman invented a two-wheeled wooden scooter. On the next page, A Closer Look shows some of the inventions that had to come first. ■

■ *In what way do modern inventions depend on the past?*



## A CLOSER LOOK

# Bicycle Technology

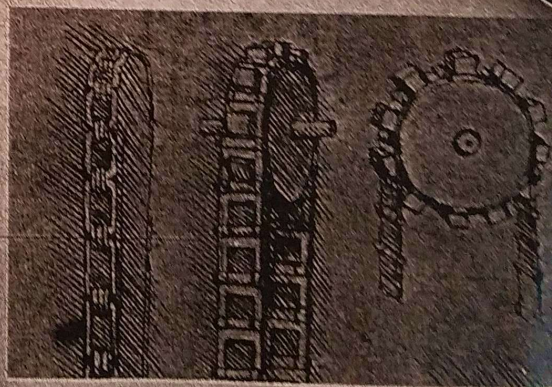
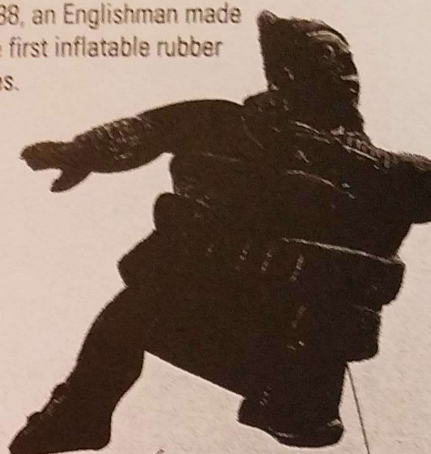
*When you ride a bicycle, you are pedaling a machine that took thousands of years to create. Each part of a bicycle has a long history.*

### How do you make a faster wheel?

That's what people in Mesopotamia were wondering about 2,000 B.C. They came up with the idea of spokes to lighten the heavy, solid wheels on their chariots (below). With spokes the chariots rolled faster.



Life didn't have much bounce before rubber was discovered in Mexico 2,000 years ago. The statue below shows an ancient Mexican athlete playing a sport that used a rubber ball. Spanish explorers brought rubber back to Europe. In 1888, an Englishman made the first inflatable rubber tires.



Italian inventor Leonardo da Vinci drew this chain drive around A.D. 1500. In 1770, a European inventor used a chain drive in silk-making machinery. From that idea the chain drive was adapted for use in bicycles in 1869.



## Learning from Other Cultures

As the example of the bicycle shows, we have built on inventions from many different periods of time and from many different cultures. A **culture** consists of the behaviors, beliefs, customs, and attitudes of a group of people. It is reflected in the artwork, the literature, the language, the inventions, and traditions of the people. It is affected by the geography and climate where people live.

We have benefited from the accomplishments of human cultures reaching back millions of years.

Throughout this book you will learn about the many contributions of these ancient cultures. You will also recognize how the

decisions and actions of people in the past affect our lives today.

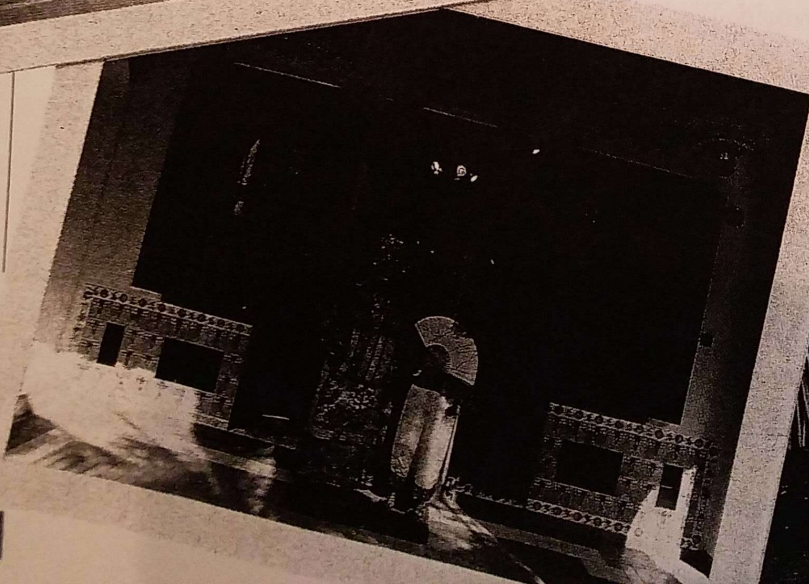
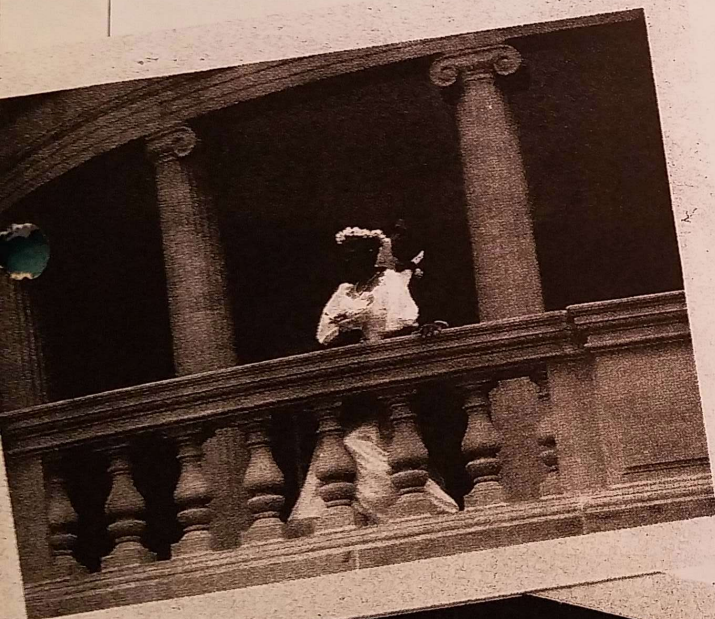
### The Earliest Cultures

The first human cultures began developing about two million years ago. One of the first accomplishments of these cultures was learning to make and use crude stone tools. With simple tools such as sharp-edged rocks, people could hunt animals for food. They also learned to work together to go after large animals. These groups of people then developed rules of behavior for members to obey.

A second important accomplishment of early cultures was learning to farm. About 9000 B.C., people in some parts of the world began to settle down in one place for long periods and produce their own food. Once farmers could produce enough crops to feed other people, some people had time to develop other skills, such as pottery making or weaving.

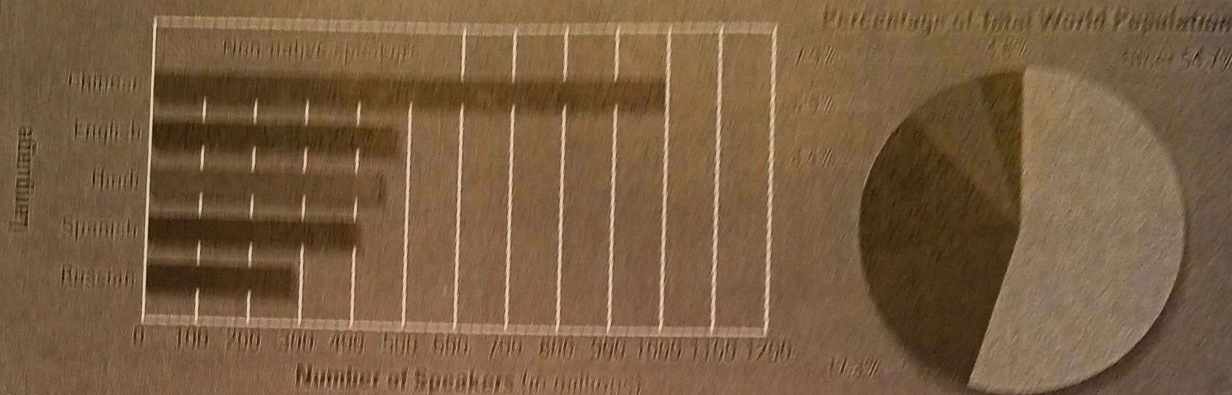
Another important development was the rise of cities in some

▼ Notice the different wedding traditions of cultures found in the United States, China, and Indonesia.





## Major World Languages



parts of the world beginning about 3500 B.C. As larger groups of people gathered together in cities, more opportunities for specialized workers, such as builders, bakers, and artists were created. In addition, city life resulted in the need for more extensive systems of government. And bringing people together also meant a greater exchange of ideas.

### Changes in Cultures

What causes cultures to change? New ideas and inventions often lead people to develop new ways of doing things. For example, the invention of writing systems allowed people to record their thoughts and discoveries and to communicate them to other people.

Changes in the environment also cause cultures to change. Over time, the climate in an area can

change. Also, natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes can alter the landscape. People must then move or learn to adjust to new living conditions.

Another major source of change is contact with other cultures. When people from different cultures meet, they are exposed to the ways of life of each culture.

Cultures change from within as well. Factors such as population growth and conflicts between groups within a culture can bring about new ways of doing things.

### The Cultures of Today

Today we live in a world of many cultures—a multicultural world. We have learned from cultures of all parts of the world, and we continue to interact with other cultures. We are linked to the cultures of the past, just as cultures of the future will be linked to us. ■

▲ Languages often vary from one culture to another. Turn to the map of world languages on page 515 of the Atlas to see where these languages are spoken.

### Across Time & Space

When cultures come in contact, they learn from each other. For example, Native Americans taught European settlers how to grow corn and sweet potatoes. The settlers passed the information back to Europe. Now these foods are cultivated all around the world.

■ What is a culture?

## REVIEW

- FOCUS** How have we learned from the past?
- CONNECT** What do cultures of today have in common with cultures of the past?
- SOCIAL SYSTEMS** How are cultures different from each other?
- CRITICAL THINKING** What will the cultures of the future be able to learn from the cultures of today?
- ACTIVITY** Select an everyday object and investigate how it is connected to the past. Make a list showing at least three inventions that are linked to the object you selected.